

**DECISION MEMO**  
**North Branch Oconto Fuels Project**

**USDA Forest Service, Region 9, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest**  
**Lakewood/Laona Ranger District**  
**Forest County, Wisconsin**  
**(T34N, R14E, Section 1)**

**I. DECISION TO BE IMPLEMENTED**

**A. Description of Decision**

It is my decision to proceed with the proposed action that is located in T34N, R14E, Section 1; Town of Freedom, Forest County, WI. This is also Laona district compartment 148, stands 5, 12, 14 and 15. According to the 2004 Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Land Resource Management Plan, this project is in Management Area 2C.

The project consists of mowing and prescribed burning of 34 acres of grass and brush openings (formerly under agricultural permit) to control light, flashy fuel buildups within the Wabeno Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Stand 5 is 21 acres; stand 12 is 4 acres; stand 14 is 3 acres and stand 15 is 6 acres.

The grass and brush openings will be mowed by mechanical means annually with prescribed burning to be done on alternate years. Mowing operations will be completed by the district fire crew or contractor with mechanized equipment.

**B. Purpose of Decision**

The purpose of this project is to meet Goal 2.8 (Fire Management) of the 2004 Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan: “Safely implement the Fire and Fuels Management Program within the Forest Service Protection area of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests. Forest Plan implementation will take into consideration all aspects of the fire and fuels program to include, but not be limited to, fire suppression, urban interface, fuels reduction, aviation, community assistance, and ecological rehabilitation and restoration.” In addition to this project fulfilling the purpose of the Forest Plan goal it also meets the need of reducing flashy fuels buildup in the Wabeno WUI to reduce the potential for wildland fire ignition.

**II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION**

**A. Category of Exclusion**

My decision fits under the following category of action identified by the Chief as an action that normally does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment Categorical Exclusion 31.2 #10 (FSH 1909.15): “Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire, not to exceed 4,500 acres, and mechanical methods for

crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching and moving, not to exceed 1,000 acres.”

Based upon my review of public involvement and the analysis in the case file, there are no extraordinary circumstances present on the sites affected by this action to indicate that a categorical exclusion is not appropriate. Therefore, my decision is excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment.

## **B. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances**

### **1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat.**

The Endangered Species Act requires that federal activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species’ designated critical habitat. It was determined that this decision will have “no impact” on listed species or their critical habitats.

### **2. Species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat.**

There will be no impacts on species or critical habitat proposed for Federal listing.

### **3. Forest Service sensitive species.**

There will be no impacts on Forest Service sensitive species.

### **4. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.**

The project will not have impacts on floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds.

### **5. Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas.**

There are no congressionally designated areas located in or near the project area.

### **6. Inventoried roadless areas.**

There are no inventoried roadless areas in the decision area.

### **7. Research Natural Areas.**

There are no Research Natural Areas in the decision area.

### **8. American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.**

None are present in the decision area.

9. Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

None are present in the decision area.

### **III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public involvement for the project was initiated in a public scoping letter on September 17, 2004. No comments were received and no issues or concerns were raised. In addition the following Forest Service personnel were consulted:

Steve Janke, Plant Ecologist  
Scott Anderson, Wildlife Biologist  
Darrell Richards, Assistant Ranger, Recreation  
Tom Moris, Wildlife Biologist, Aquatics  
Kim Schoenebeck, Archaeology Paraprofessional

### **IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS**

I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause this action to have significant effects. There are no significant irretrievable or irreversible commitments of resources needed for this activity.

I have reviewed the direction in the 2004 Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (2004 LRMP) and find this project addresses its goals and objectives and is consistent with all standards and guidelines relevant to this action.

Other laws and regulations that this project is in compliance with include but are not limited to the following, Healthy Forest Restoration Act, Healthy Forest Initiative, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act.

### **V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL**

This decision is not subject to a higher level of administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8.

### **VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

This decision may be implemented immediately.

### **VII. CONTACT PERSON**

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Al Harrison at the Lakewood/Laona Ranger District; 4978 HWY 8 West; Laona WI 54541, at (715) 674-4481.

### **VIII. SIGNATURE AND DATE**

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.1b or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. My conclusion is based on field visits, information presented in this document, and the entirety of the Planning Record.

/S/ Joel H. Skjerven

October 19, 2004

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Joel Skjerven  
District Ranger

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Date

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